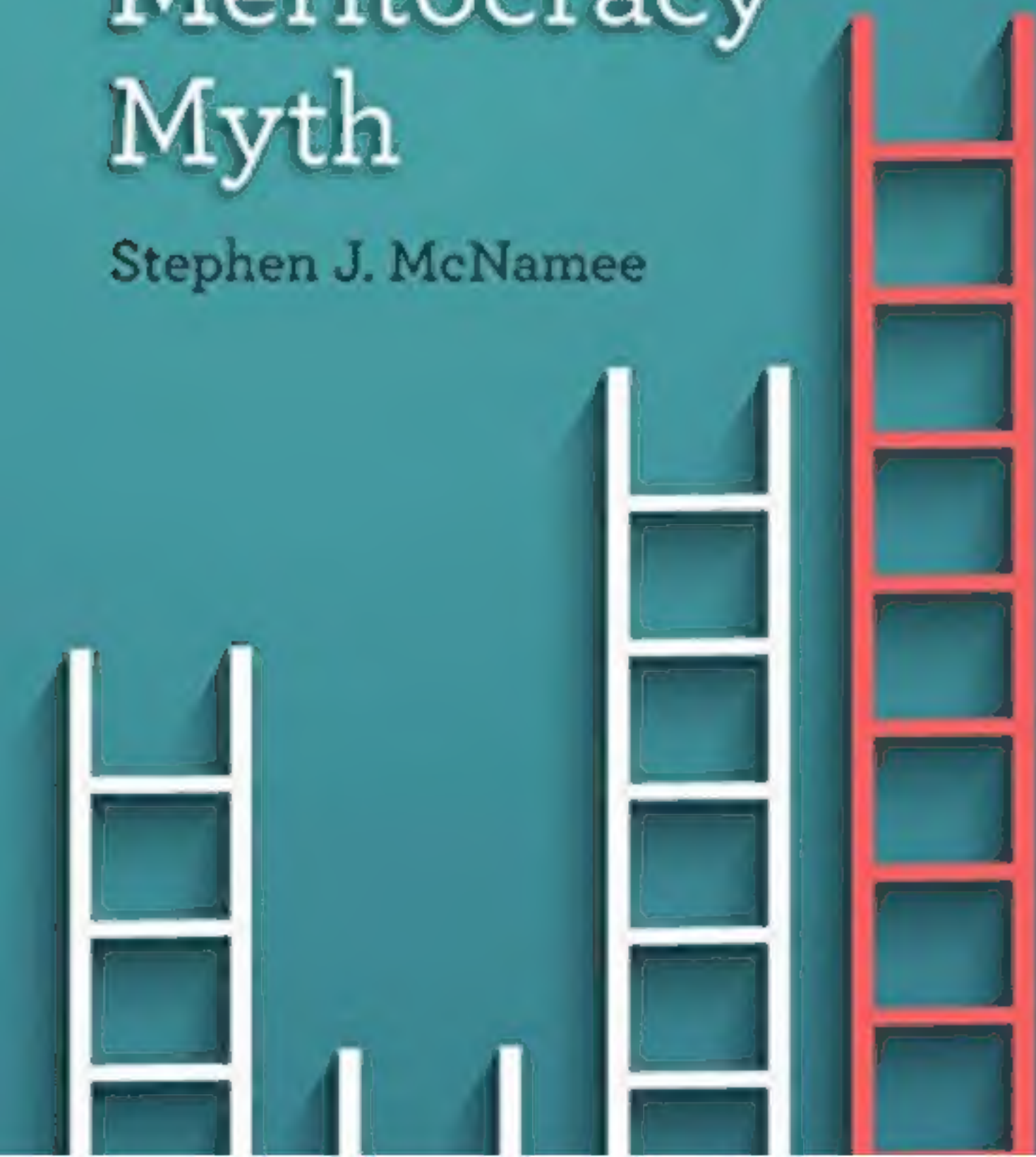


Fourth Edition

The Meritocracy Myth

Stephen J. McNamee



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Stephen J. McNamee

University of North Carolina Wilmington

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
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To the memory of
Robert K. Miller, Jr.,
colleague, coauthor, and friend

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Preface to the Fourth Edition

In the first edition of this book, published in 2004, my coauthor Robert K. Miller, Jr., and I set out to challenge the commonly held assertion that in America, people get out of the system what they put into it, based exclusively, or primarily, on their individual merit. We did not suggest that individual merit is a myth, or that it has nothing to do with who gets ahead and who falls behind. Instead, we made the case that the presumption that the system as a whole fundamentally operates on the basis of merit in determining who gets what and how much is a myth.

According to the meritocracy myth, America is a land of unlimited opportunity in which individuals can go as far as their individual talents and abilities can take them. We identified the characteristics most frequently identified with individual merit—innate talent or capacity, hard work, having the right attitude, and playing by the rules, or having high moral character and virtue—and examined the empirical evidence of the impact of these factors on prospects for social mobility. We then identified a variety of nonmerit factors, including inheritance, social and cultural capital, differential access to educational opportunities, reduced rates of self-employment, luck, and discrimination that tend to neutralize, suppress, or even negate the effects of individual merit. We concluded that the overall evidence suggests that Americans tend to overestimate the effects of merit factors and underestimate the effects of nonmerit factors in terms of how the system actually operates.

Since the publication of the first edition, nonmerit factors have become even more important. These changes are described and analyzed in the current edition. Economic inequality has increased, along with consolidation of privilege, especially at the top of the system. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened, making it more difficult for those at the bottom of the system to close the gap. Consolidation of power and privilege especially has allowed those at the top of the system to more easily pass on nonmerit economic, social, and cultural advantages to succeeding

generations. The continued decline of self-employment and increasing dominance and power of existing large corporations has further eroded the entrepreneurial pathway to social mobility, creating barriers for entry and making it more difficult for individuals to move up in the system by striking out on their own and creating new enterprises. Globalization, deindustrialization, and de-unionization have compromised opportunities for millions of working-class Americans through no fault of their own. Finally, the increasing capacity of propertied interests to disproportionately influence political outcomes has further consolidated power and privilege at the top of the system. To the extent that propertied interests prevail rather than the interests of the general public, the system gets further tilted, or "rigged," in favor of the already privileged.

NEW TO THE FOURTH EDITION

In the current edition, data, tables, and figures have been updated and descriptions of new research on these topics have been incorporated. A concerted effort was made to streamline the presentation of evidence throughout. The current edition takes a more explicitly life-cycle approach as an organizing scheme. As in previous editions, the first chapter describes the origins and prospects of the American Dream. Chapter 2 assesses the key factors associated with the formula for success based on individual merit. Subsequent chapters describe various nonmerit barriers to mobility, organized roughly by the stage of the life cycle in which they are typically encountered. Chapter 3 discusses the effects of initial class placement at birth on future life chances. Chapter 4 describes the informal advantages of social and cultural capital, resources typically initially acquired in childhood and extended throughout the life course.

Historically, the primary pathways of upward mobility in America have been through education and entrepreneurial activity. Chapter 5 describes the effects of unequal access to formal educational opportunities, beginning with K-12 and extending through higher education. Following the completion of formal education, the next stage of the life cycle for most Americans is to enter the full-time labor force. Chapter 6 describes the declining prospects for upward mobility through self-employment and the ascent of large-scale corporations. Chapter 7 describes the impact of luck on economic outcomes, especially with regard to the nonmerit effects of what kinds of jobs are available in the labor force that individuals enter into, how much they pay, and how many people are pursuing them—independent of personal characteristics.

After completing formal education and getting established in the labor market, the typical next stage in the life cycle for most people is marriage. Chapter 8 discusses the prospects for social mobility not directly based on one's merit or achievement, but through marriage or partnering. Chapter 9 discusses the nonmerit factor of discrimination in all of its forms as they relate to economic outcomes. Depending on the type involved, discrimination can be encountered throughout the life course, as

in the case of race or sex discrimination, or it may be encountered at later stages in the life course, such as with age discrimination. The concluding chapter summarizes the main points in the book and presents policy options regarding how issues of economic inequality might be addressed. Transition statements at the end of each chapter have been added to assist the reader in placing each chapter in relation to the next.

Chapter 8 (Mobility through Marriage: The Cinderella Effect) is new to this edition. The tendency toward class endogamy, especially within the upper class, was discussed in prior editions, but the increasing importance of the consolidation of privilege through marriage among the affluent and the passing on of nonmerit economic, social, and cultural privilege to children warranted a separate discussion in this new edition. Because men have historically controlled access to power, wealth, and status, this particular form of upward mobility has generally been more available to women. As women have more recently increased their levels of educational attainment and labor-force participation, however, the prospect for men to marry up has also increased. Marrying for money as the primary motivation for marriage is a type of social climbing that is generally not considered socially acceptable, and would not be viewed as a legitimate part of the American Dream. The strong tendency for homogamy and concentration of wealth at the top of the system increases the capacity for "power couples" to pass on nonmerit economic, social, and cultural advantages to children, increasingly creating "divergent destinies" for succeeding generations.

Finally, in prior editions we presented brief biographical vignettes on presidents, including George W. Bush and Barack Obama, as examples of how economic, social, and cultural factors shaped their rise to prominence. In the current edition, I have included a biographical vignette on Donald Trump and his family in this regard.

Acknowledgments

Several people facilitated the completion of this fourth edition. I thank the editors at Rowman & Littlefield, especially Sarah Stanton, Carli Hansen, and Jehanne Schweitzer, for their support and assistance in shepherding this edition along. I also acknowledge the intellectual debt I owe to my stratification teachers and mentors, including John Murray, Norbert Wiley, Reeve Vanneman, and William Form. I also thank my students, who over the course of my career have deepened and sharpened my understanding of the processes of inequality.

In addition, I am grateful to anonymous reviewers who provided useful suggestions for revision for this edition. I am grateful for the institutional support provided by the University of North Carolina Wilmington. To my colleagues in the Department of Sociology and Criminology, I extend my appreciation for their ongoing encouragement and support.

I am especially thankful to my daughter, Dr. Catherine McNamee, coauthor of chapter 8, "Mobility through Marriage," for lending her expertise to this project. Cate is a lecturer in sociology specializing in family demography in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I also wish to acknowledge my wife, Christine, for her generous understanding, patience, and helpful advice in completing this edition.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Robert K. Miller, Jr., my coauthor for the previous three editions of this book, and to whose memory this edition is dedicated. For more than thirty years, Rob and I collaborated on a number of projects. We spent countless hours deliberating on the topics and issues discussed in this book. His voice is very much still present in these pages, and words alone cannot express my intellectual indebtedness.

The American Dream

Origins and Prospects

The reason they call it the American Dream is because you have to be asleep to believe it.

—George Carlin, *Brain Droppings*

In the image of the American Dream, America is the land of opportunity. Presumably, if you work hard enough, play by the rules, and are talented enough, you can overcome any obstacle and achieve success. No matter where you start out in life, the sky is ostensibly the limit. According to the promise implied by the American Dream, you can go as far as your talents and abilities can take you.

Although most Americans enthusiastically endorse this image in abstract terms (Longoria 2009; McCall 2013), the lived experiences of many Americans tell them that factors other than merit also make a difference: "it takes money to make money" (inheritance); "it's not what you know, but who you know" (social capital); "what matters is being in the right place at the right time" (luck); "the playing field is not level" (discrimination); and "he or she married into money" (hypergamy).

Americans are ambivalent about economic inequality and often simultaneously hold contradictory principles about how income and wealth should be distributed (Longoria 2009; McCall 2013). While many Americans, for instance, proudly proclaim the virtues of "getting out of the system what you put into it" (meritocracy), they also steadfastly defend the right of individuals to dispose of their property when they die "as they personally see fit" (inheritance). These beliefs, however, pose a fundamental contradiction between freedom of choice at the individual level and equality of opportunity at the societal level. Simply put, to the extent that income and wealth are distributed on the basis of inheritance, they are not distributed on the basis of merit.

We grow our way and do it our way, the American entrepreneur, as a symbol of a moral success that is the source of the economic and cultural expansion of Americanization. (Lynn Hunt)

Religious Origins

A key source of American individualism was religious beliefs that were common to Americans who were immigrants or descendants of immigrants from various sects. A significant number of people adopted the language and values of a popular religion, so as to overcome exclusion. In this way, the cultural ideas of the immigrants in which Anglo-Saxon Protestant WASP culture became the dominant cultural force in America.

The concept of individualism is that each person is a free individual. The Puritans' greatest expression of this principle was their view of work. The dominant religious background of many of the early American Puritans. Calvinist sociologist Max Weber analyzed the principles of the Puritans in his classic work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The core of Weber's argument is that the Puritans' work ethic and sense of duty were the early drivers of the development of capitalism. The work ethic was productive work, self-denial, and investment through savings. Capitalism required early capitalism needed both a highly motivated labor force and investment in capital.

As part of the break with Catholicism, Puritans emphasized an individual rather than a communal relationship with God. Puritans particularly eschewed Catholic sacramentalism and hierarchical structures. The seven sacraments were reduced to the emphasis was on a direct relationship with God through individual prayer and reading of the Bible. The Protestant Reformation also shifted the traditional Catholic view of work as punishment for original sin to the idea of work as a sacred calling, a mission from God to seek salvation and gain eternal life. People should be diligent in their work and God would bless them and were called up to contribute to the world and to seek for God's things which were called world matters.

The greatest expression of this ethic was in the Puritan sect of Calvinism. The Calvinists believed in predestination, which meant that people determined their salvation by whether they were "chosen" for it by God. This belief created among the followers what Weber called "salvation anxiety," worried individuals who tried to ascertain whether they were among the elect and that they should believe that worldly success could be taken as a sign of God's grace. So driven by salvation anxiety, people worked very hard to achieve success so that they could demonstrate to themselves and others that they were among the elect.

These Puritan values of individualism, industry, frugality, and prudence were reinforced by American Puritanism (Weiss 1969) and were integrated into the core of American culture (Cohen 2003; Samuel 2012). The best-known example of this was the Puritanism of the early settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The son of a Puritan minister and a Harvard graduate who for a

views of justice in regarding the right to own property seem and surprise is the intergenerational transfer through the process of inheritance, here we tend to perpetuate existing inequalities across generations. To summarize another theories in more colloquial terms, them that has, gets.

These sociological perspectives and other versions of merit in other disciplines have been debated extensively (Korbin 1973: 83-98; McNamara and Miller 1988). It is not only those who have not explicitly explored these theories but also tend to put the current discussion into theoretical context. Functional theories imply a system of meritocracy in which individuals get ahead based on their individual talents and abilities. Conflict theories, on the other hand, imply a system of inheritance in which peoples' life chances are largely determined by their starting point within an existing structure of inequality. Functional theorists focus on individual characteristics such as talent, ability, and works as primary determinants of inequality. Conflict theories focus on structural factors such as inheritance, socialization, and variation in opportunities as the primary determinants of inequality.

Merit and nonmerit factors are not mutually exclusive explanations for individual economic outcomes. Such outcomes have been influenced by structural causes, including inheritance and other social and economic systems that flow from these factors. It is always difficult to account for the kind of economic inequality that exists, and with what consequences. It is a common theme, however, that the dominant ideology of meritocracy has a strong tendency to overestimate the effects of merit on economic outcomes and to underestimate the effects of nonmerit factors.

DOWNSIZING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Worldwide views of the prospects of achieving the American Dream have expanded over time, in particular since the nation's founding. A number of groups, including minorities and especially women, have not been able to achieve the same political and social opportunities. The process of expansion of political and social opportunities has been slow and uneven. While there is ongoing discrimination, and the effects of past discrimination continue to the present, the overall expansion of greater opportunities to a wider segment of American society is undeniable. From its humble beginning as a British colony, America has emerged as the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world. The vastness of its society and the material wealth of its citizens, success generations have enjoyed, and the steadily expanding opportunities.

Recently, however, the prospects for attaining the American Dream have been diminishing for a large segment of the American population. The American Dream implies not just a general expectation for the future and a form of success, but also a sense of what the future of the dream would mean. Although specific and very severe outcomes are generally associated with the decline of the American Dream, including the loss of ownership property and life chances for the next generation.

opportunities to get rich and a secure and comfortable retirement each are
 chances of achieving these aspects of the American Dream are much less
 for younger generations.

Home Ownership

In a 1980s census study up to 70 percent of the *Immigrant American* population
 devotes 10-14 percent of their income to housing. The 1990s saw a decline in
 the terms of fulfillment of the dream: the real estate market between 1980 and
 1990, rates of home ownership remained at slightly less than one half of the Amer-
 ican population. In the post-World War II period, suburbanization was a primary
 and veterans' benefits part of the effort to set down roots and a new way
 from the city to the suburbs. The perfect storm of 1980s home ownership was
 a way to build that linked suburbanization with the economic boom. The
 period of rapid expansion of American suburbs after the war, the suburb house, the
 suburbs with the two-car garage and a green lawn, maintained a symbol of the
 fulfillment of the dream. Owners of these homes were communities who worked
 in the urban areas and had access to the city's amenities. The suburbs were
 prosperous. The dream was a way to live a better life.

Yet economic success was reserved for a few. The 1980s saw a new
 war period exacerbated the problems of central cities. The economic crisis
 the rates of segregation and racial tension. The economic crisis eroded along
 with public services including schools, police, and fire. The economic crisis
 the fulfillment of the dream. The economic crisis was a high rate of crime,
 crime drugs, unemployment, poverty, and despair.

After 1960 average quality of life in the suburbs was on a decline. The
 around 63 to 64 percent until the mid-1990s when rates began a steady increase
 reaching a peak at the height of the housing bubble in 2004 at 65 percent. The
 Census Bureau 2004. Home ownership rates began to fall in the aftermath of the
 in 2004, a year that precipitated the Great Recession. In 2008, the housing market
 reached the lowest record numbers of foreclosed sales and bankruptcies. As well as
 a series of bank failures leading to a massive \$7 trillion loss in the U.S. stock market.
 Americans lost their homes altogether or were "underwater" owing more on their
 mortgages than the value of the houses as housing prices plummeted. Mortgages
 became harder to obtain as banks required higher creditworthiness for
 the new mortgages. By the end of 2010, the home ownership rate had fallen to 64
 percent. The Census Bureau 2010. Clearly the promise of home ownership as a
 central marker of having achieved the American Dream has dimmed in the wake
 of the economic crisis.

Moreover, it is important to note that these rates of home ownership are based
 on the government's definition of what constitutes a home, which combines all
 homes, including rental and homes that are owned outright. Mortgages for
 owners do create a debt, but they pay off their mortgages. The

living on the peak age of homes. Another indicator of wealth disparity is seen over time. In 1890, for instance, 12 percent of owner-occupied residents owned their own homes outright (Deaton 1994). In 2015, only slightly more than one-third (35 percent) of owner-occupied residents owned their homes outright (U.S. Census Bureau 2015).

Better Opportunities for the Next Generation

Another aspect of the American dream is the idea that each new generation will have a higher standard of living and better opportunities than the previous one. For a long period of time, the American story was written in terms of upward mobility, such as the period of the Great Depression, which was a period of the past. As America emerged from a mostly agrarian to a mostly industrial economy, opportunities expanded along with generally high rates of growth in the economy as a whole and with the increases in the general standard of living. It was especially the case in the post-World War II era of general prosperity in which the baby-boom generation came of age. Yet a more dramatic redistribution of income has not followed technological advances beginning in the 1970s and accelerating ever since, as reduced overall income inequality has not benefited the lower income households to the bottom of the system.

A recent study released by the Pew Research Center in 2015 would indicate that fewer Americans are able to live up to the dream that their parents achieved. The study has drawn a line between the baby-boom generation (those born in 1946) and the generation born after their parents' 50 percent income threshold. Parents born before 1946 had an average income of \$10,000 in 1960, while those born after 1946 had a 50 percent for those born in 1980.

Another way this generation is expected to differ is in its aspect of the American dream as seen in the way it is viewed as a generation of opportunity. As previously noted, rates of homeownership have declined since the Great Depression, but the rates of homeownership have increased in the last few years. The rate of homeownership has increased from 2 percent in 1960 to 35 percent in 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). While lower wage growth has been a factor in living at home with parents, some studies refer to as "boomer-boom" (10 to 33 percent of respondents in that year said they were living in their parents' homes compared to 1 percent of the corresponding age group in 1960) (Pew 2016).

Several factors have contributed to these trends, including increased age at first marriage and a corresponding growth in student loan debt, weakening labor market and the resulting wage stagnation. A recent survey results show that young adults continue to desire to buy homes instead of renting or living with parents (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco 2015). In many ways, the ability to own a home is a key to financial success. As many Millennials are finding out, buying a home means a delay in financial growth, a home which is a family's greatest financial asset and primary source of wealth (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco 2015).

Self-employment which is expected to peak in the 1980s after 1970s declines were replaced by most meteoric rises in personal wealth came not from wages or salaries but from high entrepreneurial activity—starting and owning businesses. With the decline in family farms and businesses and the direct linkage of corporations to the economy, rates of self-employment plummeted. New business starts are not nearly as high as in the 1960s. Americans these days have decreased odds of attaining the likelihood of "rags-to-riches" scenarios.

Secure and Comfortable Retirement

A secure and comfortable retirement is a primary wish of the aging population. The American Dream in modern America is complete when retirement is achieved through accumulated savings, investments, pensions, and Social Security. Retirement pension rates declined. Those who relied on firms for instance, received adjustments that were paid to them if they survived and were no longer able to work. Through much of the early 1950s, the United States life expectancy was short, savings were scarce, pensions were rare. Social Security was nonexistent.

With the rise of a desire for a comfortable retirement, certain programs became more common. In 1935, a part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, new social security sprang into being. Social security was established to deal with the poverty rates for those over sixty-five were substantial. In 1960, other age groups' Medicare fees were taxed without a limit on earnings and the growth of purchasing power as prices increased. The top percentage of the senior has become richer. However, Congress passed Medicare which provided guaranteed access to health care for Americans over sixty-five. Social Security reduced the individual's need for health care for this population. In addition, in the mid-1960s, Social Security payments were automatically adjusted. Because of a price index, many aging people source of fixed incomes for elderly. They benefited greatly with post-World War II economic prosperity, profits improved, and economic conditions for elderly Americans who now have a rate of poverty significantly below the national average.

None the less, the future of secure retirement is not a foregone conclusion. Social Security and Medicare. Unless rates are raised or benefits or eligibility reduced, the Social Security system will eventually become insolvent. As the large postwar baby boom generation ages, increasingly dependent on the social security system, after 2020 the treasury will use trust fund assets in excess of interest earnings until the social fund reserves are depleted in 2034, after which the trust will be required to pay only about three-fourths of the scheduled benefits through the end of the program period in 2070. A Social Security Administration report in 2000.

There are other retirement developments. More and more of America's workers have more power sponsored pension plans. That percentage is increasing over time. Center for Retirement Research, 2006. Of workers with pension plans an increasing proportion of those plans are defined contribution benefits tied to market

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Now, if relatives ρ prove to dramatically reduce the risk of passing on a trait, then the relative risk of the trait being passed on is reduced and therefore the trait is more likely to be passed on. This is a greater importance to the trait and the trait is more likely to be passed on. And having that importance recognized and rewarded. These are the same things that the trait is of. And the trait is the same thing.

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Frederick Douglass
 Second Bureau
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 New York, N.Y. 10001
 Under the name of Frederick Douglass
 2000 N. 3rd Street
 New York, N.Y. 10001

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2. a "House, Vacancies and Homeownership" program that allows the elderly to purchase a portion of a home. Residents would own 25% of the property, while the local housing authority would own the remaining 75%.

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Department of Education, U.S. National Office of Educational Statistics
Washington, D.C. 20540-0001

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 College of the City of New York. He died in 1733 at the age of 60 years.

Y. Yoon, a senior advisor to Suzanne Bartholomew, Barbara O'Neil, and Michael S. Collins, is a frequent contributor to the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *Forbes*, and *Entrepreneur*. Yoon's previous books include #1 best-seller *How to Start a Business* (1997).

creating a America I have created a new class of people who are not only given opportunities to a broader education but also a more advanced one. At present it is revealing a class on which we can depend for the future. I have created a new class and privilege. Moreover, with new technological advances there is a growing premium in society on intellectual prowess.

The publication of *The Bell Curve* was one which provoked a great deal of controversy. In 1996 Bowles et al. (1995) wrote upshot of the many criticisms of *The Bell Curve* is that as a text of fairly assumptions and the very new errors between and Murray greatly overestimated the influence of innate intelligence nature and greatly underestimated the influence of environmental factors. More recently rigorous reviews by Nathan Colney and Jason Fletcher (2007) found no empirical support for the three main assertions in *The Bell Curve* that the elite genetic endowment on economic outcomes is increasing over time that through intermarriage the cognitive elite are passing on enhanced genetic endowments to their children compared to the children of the non-cognitive elite and that because of higher birthrates among the non-cognitive elites there is a decline in cognitive capacity in the population as a whole.

Other research shows that IQ is only modestly correlated with income (30) and negatively correlated with wealth (16) (Zagonky 1998). The vast amount of variance in what you earn, income, and especially what you own, wealth, is most likely due to something else. Furthermore, it stands to reason that IQ would be more associated with income than wealth. IQ is likely to have at least some bearing on the capacity to do certain kinds of more complicated tasks for which some individuals would receive higher compensation than others. Wealth acquisition, however, is more about owning than doing. For instance, it does not take superior intellect to inherit the family fortune. Most people know intuitively that the question "If you are so smart, then why aren't you rich?" is not really a question at all, but a rhetorical comment implying that there is much more to monetary "success" than intelligence, whatever that means and however it might be measured.

IQ is likely to make the most difference at the extremes, especially at the lower end of the scale. It is unlikely that those with severe mental disabilities, for instance, could become neurosurgeons. And it probably helps to have a lot of inherent capacity to perform high-level and intellectually demanding tasks, although other factors might determine who makes the most of what capacities they have. It is not required to be the "smartest" to perform most high level tasks, but rather to be "smart enough" and a fairly high proportion of the population is likely to have sufficient mental capacity to perform most tasks.

Beyond the issue of whether generalized raw intellectual capacity can be measured precisely or what minimal thresholds of capacity might be required, other dimensions of what most people would consider "smart" could vary independently. One might distinguish, for instance, "street smarts" (people smart in book smarts) from raw intellectual capacity alone. Individuals with these various kinds of "smarts" who may or may not score high on standardized IQ tests would never be easily be

[illegible]

celebrities and stage
represents raw, true actual capacity, other people may donate to charity and achieve
the same popularity perceived as part of the merit formula. These include but are
not limited to athletes and artistic abilities. These traits are often associated with
the "celebrity" motif. The view that such factors can propel someone from rags
to riches is an interesting one. When people think of who's really
rich, American professional athletes who artists, e.g. actors, singers, writers, who
command huge salaries for their services often come to mind first. Although star
athletes and actresses earn huge annual incomes for their services, such as singer
Beyoncé who has 30 million on radio personality Howard Stern, \$85 million singer
Mariah Carey, 30 million basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, 20 million basketball player
Kobe Bryant, 15 million on TV actor Matt Damon, \$55 million on TV actress
Jennifer Aniston, the wealthiest person in America comes not from working and living at all
but to develop income producing property. Among the one hundred highest paid
celebrities in America who are males, 50 enter a business, none is among the wealthiest
in the United States. It is a stark reality where there are no star athletes or a
few who are. The richest Americans are more than 50 percent of the stock owners
professional sports stars. And while there are a few who are millionaires, the list of the
wealthiest 1000 Americans there are two movie producers, George Lucas
and Steven Spielberg who own their own production companies. *Forbes* 11/16

An important step in developing a national wealth strategy. Americans can't
rely on the corporations and we're own to a large part. So we have to
invest in our physical infrastructure and human capital success. It's not
enough to force the public sector and let it do what it wants. It's not
that we can't take on

recorded after an operation, for instance are easily identified and have
 excellent records of their own, the average person's size speed,
 and other characteristics. However, it is not always possible to
 record the data, and the opportunity is lost. The data are
 not particularly accurate, and the absence of appropriate development and control
 may be expensive and not easily available to people of modest means.
 particular in such aspects as gift, terms, and figure skating.

[illegible]

The first of these is the fact that the United States is a young nation. It is only about 150 years old, and its history is therefore a history of rapid change. The second is the fact that the United States is a large nation. It covers a vast area of land, and its population is growing rapidly. The third is the fact that the United States is a diverse nation. It is made up of many different peoples, races, and religions, and this diversity has led to a rich and varied culture. The fourth is the fact that the United States is a powerful nation. It has a strong economy, a powerful military, and a significant influence on the world stage. The fifth is the fact that the United States is a democratic nation. It has a system of government that is based on the principles of liberty, justice, and equality, and this system has been the source of much of its success.

The sixth is the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants. It has been built by people from many different parts of the world, and this has led to a melting pot of cultures and traditions. The seventh is the fact that the United States is a nation of pioneers. It has a long history of exploration and discovery, and this has led to a spirit of adventure and innovation. The eighth is the fact that the United States is a nation of freedom. It has a strong tradition of individual rights and liberties, and this has been a major factor in its success. The ninth is the fact that the United States is a nation of progress. It has been at the forefront of many of the most important technological and scientific advances of the modern world. The tenth is the fact that the United States is a nation of hope. It has a bright future ahead of it, and it is a country that is full of potential.

... a person who speaks attitudes are ... by determining the ...
... success as opposed to being there associated with ... sequence ...
... each particular attitudes are associated with success ... particular cases.
... professions or professions. Furthermore, it is not clear how to measure these ...
... distinguish their effects from other related factors, such as ...
... of what passes as the right attitude to a situation ...
... of different access to preferred forms of ...
... many times is a spontaneous, genuine and an presentation of self ...
... by others as attitude may be more a reflection of upbringing than an ...
... of a valid attitude. These traits may be seen as desirable by ...
... and hence even these traits may not act as their job performance.

WORKING HARD OR HARDLY WORKING.

in the term "attitudes" or getting ahead, hard work typically ranks by far as the most prominent factor of success. Americans, McGahey (1955) writes, "It is difficult to disentangle the effects of attitudes from such factors as intelligence, drive, aggressiveness, ambition, and so on from actual hard work. Attitudes alone, however, are likely not as important as actual behavior."

Americans had the brains, knowledge and aptitude when it came to education and what is more, they had a passion for it. The problem was that they were going to school, but not for the right reasons. They were working "hard" but not "smart". They were not applying the "right" tools. How are these factors related to corporate success and educational success? That is what this book is all about.

[illegible]

come from working for living at all. Not from ownership of property—especially the kind of property that produces additional wealth, such as stocks and bonds, real estate, business assets, and so on. Indeed, those who live off *unearned* income from investments may not need to work at all. If one is wealthy enough, it is possible to hire small armies of accountants, lawyers, and brokers to manage one's holdings and settle an onerous tax wealthiest of all Americans.

So, one wonders how one would actually know how hard people work. If we consider the obvious measure of hours worked, the data show that Americans already work more than workers in most other developed countries. Americans, for instance, on average work 9 percent more hours a year than Europeans, or about 265 hours more a year. Back in 2010, Americans also retire later and have fewer and shorter vacations than Europeans. In addition, Americans are extremely averse to any power wage theft, enough that the lack of overtime and other unpaid work (Gig economy, Kroger 2017) added by the long rest of employees in the private sphere of their workers through new digital technologies such as cell phones.

Moreover, working hard—in terms of working longer hours—can have a detrimental consequence for workers: employing more hours reduces the general productivity. Deaton (2015), Deaton (2014), Schor (2018), and others have shown that excessive hours of work and productivity can decline as a worker works longer hours, which is why, for instance, there are safety restrictions on how many consecutive hours—total hours per day—that pilots, medical doctors, truck drivers, and others can work (Deaton 2013).

But do more hours worked translate into greater occupational or economic success? In *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) offers a rule of thumb that, citing studies of chess and basketball, is that of about ten thousand hours of practice to develop world-class performance. Success, in his view, is an endeavor Gladwell was making the point that, while a one does not spontaneously produce results. That is, any capacity that individuals have must not only be initially identified and provided an opportunity to flourish, but also honed through hours of application and practice to reach elite levels. He does not mean, however, that ten thousand hours of application to doing different things produces equivalent results. Most people spend considerably more than ten thousand hours in the work that they do, a lifetime, but they are not all equally successful. Spending ten thousand hours working as a waitress or misting the soya is unlikely to have as much economic benefit, for instance, as ten thousand hours working as a neurosurgeon.

So, if there is a biological limit on how much any one person can 'work' and most Americans appear in general to work hard, there is simply not enough variation in hours worked or intensity of effort to account for the substantial and growing extent of economic and wealth inequality. Those at the very top of the system, for instance, do not and cannot possibly work billions of times more than average Americans. Yet as previously noted, when respondents are asked to state the reasons for their success, they almost always answer, 'hard work' or some variant. People claim that they deserve their success because they work hard. Yet deservedness is not equivalent to hard work and, as has been repeatedly shown, many people who work hard are

which they received their training, even though this in itself does not necessarily measure the merit of an individual.

Some of the most heated debates in hiring, however, have more to do with the faculty on the hiring committees than the candidates themselves. Hiring can become a political battle over which faction or coalition will prevail. Factions might develop over methodological, theoretical, or substantive differences within the hiring committee. Everything else being equal (and frequently even when it is not), faculty members will try to hire someone like themselves. Individual faculty may also be interested in promoting the power of their own faction or in hiring someone who might be a personal asset to them, even if that person is not the most "meritorious" in the pool.

When the dust of these debates clears, normally three candidates are brought to campus for an extended interview, usually lasting two or three full days each. During this time, candidates have one-on-one interviews with faculty and administrators and typically teach a class and give a research presentation. There are also a number of opportunities for informal interaction at dinners, receptions, and community tours. I have been amazed over the years at how frequently the top three on paper do not end up being ranked in the same order after on-campus interviews, reflecting the differences alluded to above between real and paper presentations of self. Another intangible screening factor is how well the candidates are "liked." Here, social skills may be more important than technical expertise or paper qualifications. How people present themselves in a job interview, however, may not predict how well they will actually perform on the job. Everything else being equal (and sometimes not so equal), at this final stage of the hiring process the candidate who "gets along" best with the most influential members of the committee will typically triumph over others.

In the end, a job offer is made to one person. Although the hiring committee, the department, and administrators may congratulate themselves for having selected the "best" person in the pool, the reality is that there is, in fact, no way to determine that with certainty. Do we routinely hire highly qualified candidates who are very meritorious? Absolutely. Have we always hired the *most* meritorious person for the job? Probably not, but we will never know for sure. The point of this extended example is to show that even within the professoriate, a profession in which academic qualifications and individual merit are highly extolled, there is no assurance that the "best" ultimately prevails. The hiring process is likely to be even more slippery and uncertain for real estate agents, store clerks, janitors, and a host of other jobs for which the merit criteria may be less agreed upon and more difficult to measure, and for which the screening processes are far less rigorous. When it comes to hiring the "best" or "most qualified," there are many slips betwixt the cup and the lip.

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the meritocratic formula for getting ahead in America: being talented, having the right attitude, working hard, and having high moral stan-

dards. With the exception of high moral standards, all of them have some bearing on getting ahead in America. That is, individual capacity, certain attitudes, and hard work all probably do help people get ahead. High moral standards, however, may actually have the opposite effect by reducing the options available to get ahead. While being made of the "right stuff" in general helps people to get ahead, the reality is that these qualities exist in far greater quantity in the general population than is ever actually realized. Moreover, many individual traits often have social origins, and the effects of these traits are often much less than is presumed. By themselves, these traits are not typically enough to make the difference. It is not innate capacity alone, or hard work alone, or the proper frame of mind alone, that makes a difference. Rather, it is the combination of opportunity and these other factors that makes a difference.

The presumption that people know merit when they see it is also called into question. How do we really know who is the most meritorious? Recall that it is a cardinal principle in meritocracy that the "most" qualified or "best" person should be hired for the job. An example from the process for hiring professors illustrates that it is often difficult or impossible to know who the best is.

Subsequent chapters examine various nonmerit factors that affect where people end up in the system, beginning with the effects of inheritance or where one starts out in the first place.

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